

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3290

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

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SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN LABOR GOVERNMENT RETAINS POWER WITH MAJORITY
OF FIVE OR SEVEN SEATS

REF: CANBERRA 3002

1. SUMMARY: AUSTRALIAN LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS RETAINED POWER WITH MAJORITY OF AT LEAST FIVE SEATS IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, THOUGH THIS MAY INCREASE TO SEVEN WHEN OUTCOME IN ONE SEAT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA DECIDED. LABOR PROSPECTS OF CONTROLLING SENATE HAVE SLIPPED IN LAST FEW DAYS, THOUGH RESULTS NOT EXPECTED TO BE AVAILABLE FOR UP TO THREE MORE WEEKS. PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM HAS NOTED RESULTS WITH SATISFACTION AND INDICATED HIS INTENTION TO CONTINUE AMBITIOUS PROGRAM OF CHANGE, DESPITE HIS DIMINISHED MAJORITY BOTH IN TERMS OF SEATS IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND IN TERMS OF OVERALL VOTE. OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN HAS ACKNOWLEDGED LABOR WILL FORM NEW GOVERNMENT, THOUGH HE HAS DECLINED TO ADMIT DEFEAT IN SO MANY WORDS. THIS TEL EXAMINES PARLIAMENTARY IMPLICATIONS OF ELECTION OUTCOME, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION PARTIES. IMPLICATIONS
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FOR U.S. POLICY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN ECONOMIC POLICY IN

COMING YEAR WILL BE SUBJECTS OF SEPARATE MESSAGES. END SUMMARY.

2. AUSTRALIAN LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS RETAINED GOVERNMENT WITH MAJORITY OF AT LEAST FIVE SEATS IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, THOUGH OUTCOME IN SENATE CONTINUES TO BE UNCERTAIN. LABOR WILL CERTAINLY HAVE 66 SEATS IN NEW HOUSE, AND LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTIES WILL HAVE AT LEAST 60 SEATS (39 LIBERAL, 21 COUNTRY PARTY). OUTCOME IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA SEAT OF STIRLING (PERTH METROPOLITAN AREA) STILL UNCLEAR, WITH LIKELIHOOD THAT WINNER (LIBERAL OR LABOR) WILL HAVE MAJORITY OF LESS THAN 10 VOTES OUT OF SOME 55,000. IN OUTGOING HOUSE, LABOR HAD 67 SEATS COMPARED TO LIBERAL-COUNTRY TOTAL OF 58, BUT TWO NEW SEATS WERE ADDED FOR THIS ELECTION, AND RESULTS IN TERMS OF SEATS ARE NOT FULLY COMPARABLE.

3. LABOR PROSPECTS OF CONTROLLING SENATE HAVE SLIPPED IN PAST FEW DAYS, AND MOST OBSERVERS ARE PREDICTING LABOR WILL HAVE 29 SEATS AGAINST COMBINED OPPOSITION TOTAL OF 31. HOWEVER, SENATE RESULTS NOT EXPECTED TO BE DEFINITIVE FOR AT LEAST THREE MORE WEEKS AND PERHAPS LONGER, IF THERE ARE CHALLENGES.

4. THIS WAS FIRST GENERAL ELECTION IN WHICH 18 TO 21 YEAR OLD GROUP (ABOUT 800,000 VOTERS) TOOK PART, AND GENERAL BELIEF, BASED ON SAMPLINGS, IS THAT THEY VOTED FOR LABOR BY MARGIN OF ABOUT 55 PERCENT TO 45 PERCENT FOR OPPOSITION. AS LABOR MARGIN, NATION-WIDE, WAS ABOUT 160,000, YOUTH VOTE MAY HAVE BEEN DECISIVE, THOUGH DATA TO SUPPORT THIS VIEW IS NOT YET AVAILABLE.

5. MEANWHILE, SIGNIFICANT FACT IS THAT LABOR HAS RETURNED TO GOVERNMENT. IN RECORDED TV SPEECH TO NATION MAY 29 A RESTRAINED BUT QUIETLY DETERMINED PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM SAID PEOPLE HAD RETURNED GOVERNMENT WITH "COMFORTABLE MAJORITY....FURTHER, YOU HAVE STRENGTHENED OUR POSITION IN THE SENATE." HE MADE CLEAR THAT BILLS WHICH SENATE HAD PREVIOUSLY BLOCKED, LEADING TO DOUBLE DISSOLUTION, (REFERRING SPECIFICALLY TO BILLS TO PROVIDE FOR MORE EQUAL ELECTORATES, TWO SENATORS FROM EACH OF THE TWO TERRITORIES, UNIVERSAL HEALTH INSURANCE, AND THE PETROLEUM AND MINERALS AUTHORITY) "CAN NOW BE PASSED AND THEY WILL BE." HE SAID THAT ALP HAD RECEIVED 200,000 MORE VOTES THAN COMBINED OPPOSITION PARTIES (OUT OF ABOUT 7.5 MILLION VOTES CAST). HE

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SAID THAT "ANY DOUBT OR DELAY IN THE OUTCOME STEMMED NOT FROM ANY INDECISION ON THE PART OF THE ELECTORS, BUT FROM THE COMPLEXITY OF OUR ELECTORAL LAWS." HE SAID THAT GOVERNMENTS SHOULD STAY IN OFFICE FOR FULL THREE YEARS OF THEIR TERM, AND THAT NATION'S AFFAIRS MAY AT TIMES CALL FOR UNPOPULAR DECISIONS. HE TOUCHED ON INFLATION, REFERRING TO IT AS A PROBLEM TO BE MET "WHILE FULFILLING THE WISHES, HOPES AND NEEDS OF THE NATION AND PROTECTING THE WEAKER SECTIONS OF THE COMMUNITY." AMONG NEW ITEMS OF

LEGISLATION (IN ADDITION TO PASSING BILLS PREVIOUSLY REJECTED BY SENATE) TO BE PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT HE MENTIONED NATIONAL COMPENSATION (NATIONAL WAGE STANDARDS), NATIONAL SUPERANNUATION (PENSIONS), MODERNIZATION OF SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEM, LABOR RE-TRAINING, HELP FOR HOME-OWNERS, NATIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN RE-MODELLING CITIES, CARE AND EDUCATION FOR PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN, AND PROTECTION OF AUSTRALIA'S RESOURCES AND PROMOTION OF AUSTRALIAN OWNERSHIP.

6. IN PRESS CONFERENCE AND TV APPEARANCE MAY 29 OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN SAID LABOR WOULD HAVE FIVE OR SEVEN SEAT MAJORITY AND HE CONGRATULATED WHITLAM AND HIS COLLEAGUES. HOWEVER, DESPITE PERSISTENT PRESS QUESTIONS, HE REFUSED TO CONCEDE DEFEAT IN SO MANY WORDS, CONFINING HIMSELF TO ADMISSION THAT OPPOSITION DID NOT WIN. HE SAID, "....IT IS TO BE HOPED THAT THEY DO NOT TRY TO MISCONTRUE THE VERDICT OF THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE. IT HAS TAKEN 10 DAYS EVEN TO BE SURE WHO HAS FINALLY WON THE ELECTION. BY NO STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION CAN THIS BE PRESENTED AS A CLEARCUT MANDATE FROM THE ELECTORATE. THE MESSAGE IS QUITE OBVIOUS--PROCEED BUT WITH EXTREME CAUTION." HE PREDICTED GROWING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, INCLUDING RISING PRICES, A FALL IN AUSTRALIAN INTERNATIONAL RESERVES, AND A CREDIT SQUEEZE AND SAID "FURTHER DETERIORATION IN THE ECONOMIC SITUATION MUST NOT BE ALLOWED." HE SAID, "IN OPPOSITION WE WILL CONTINUE TO PLAY A RESPONSIBLE,

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3291

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

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CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE. WE ARE CONSCIOUS OF OUR OBLIGATION TO THE SUBSTANTIAL PROPORTION OF THE AUSTRALIAN ELECTORATE THAT WAS OPPOSED TO THE RETURN OF A LABOR GOVERNMENT....THE LABOR GOVERNMENT DOES NOT HAVE A MANDATE FOR RADICAL CHANGE. IT HAS LOST GROUND IN THIS ELECTION, AND ITS REFERENDUM PROPOSALS HAVE BEEN CONVINCINGLY DEFEATED...."

7. PARLIAMENTARY IMPLICATIONS - PRIME MINISTER HAS CORRECTLY APPRECIATED FACT THAT OUTCOME--TENTATIVE AS IT IS--HAS GIVEN HIM THE NUMBERS TO PUSH THROUGH THAT PORTION OF HIS PROGRAM WHICH SENATE PREVIOUSLY OPPOSED, (I.E., SIX MAJOR BILLS). EVEN IF OPPOSITION HAS 31 SEATS IN SENATE, VERSUS ALP'S 29, JOINT SITTING OF BOTH HOUSES, IN VIEW OF LABOR MAJORITY IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF AT LEAST FIVE (AND PERHAPS SEVEN), WILL PASS THESE BILLS. HOWEVER, ONE OF PRINCIPAL BILLS, INVOLVING REDISTRICTING OF ELECTORATES, MAY NOT BECOME REALITY UNTIL NEXT SENATE PARTIAL ELECTIONS IN 1976, AS OPPOSITION IN SENATE, IF IT STANDS TOGETHER, COULD BLOCK IMPLEMENTATION OF BILL. MOREOVER, IF OPPOSITION CONTROLS SENATE AND STANDS TOGETHER, ITS CAPACITY TO BLOCK NEW ITEMS IN LABOR LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM WILL REMAIN UNAFFECTED. THIS WILL NOT, OF COURSE, BE PROBLEM IF LABOR CONTROLS SENATE, THOUGH THIS OUTCOME SEEMS UNLIKELY AT THIS POINT.
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8. PARLIAMENTARY SITUATION IN HOUSE IS THAT, AFTER ELECTION OF SPEAKER, LABOR WILL HAVE EFFECTIVE MAJORITY OF FOUR OR SIX, MAKING IT POSSIBLE TO CONDUCT BUSINESS NORMALLY. PRIME MINISTER WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE TRIPS ABROAD, WHICH HE CLEARLY ENJOYS, WITHOUT PUTTING HIS GOVERNMENT AT RISK, THOUGH THE PARLIAMENTARY AGENDA HE MENTIONED IN HIS TV SPEECH MAY 29 FOCUSSES ALMOST ENTIRELY ON DOMESTIC ISSUES.

9. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT - WHITLAM IS A PROUD AND ARROGANT MAN, AND, THOUGH HIS DEMEANOR MAY 29 WAS QUIET AND ASSURED, HE IS EXUDING CONFIDENCE. HIS STATEMENT ON ELECTION OUTCOME GILDS THE ALP LILY. THE ALP RECEIVED 160,000 VOTES MORE THAN THE COMBINED OPPOSITION (NOT 200,000, AS HE SAID), AND THE ALP PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE FELL FROM 49.59 PERCENT IN 1972 TO 49.3 PERCENT IN 1974. THE LOSS IS NOT A SERIOUS ONE, BUT THE LIBERAL PARTY RECEIVED 34.9 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, COMPARED TO 32 PERCENT IN 1972, WHILE THE COUNTRY PARTY RECEIVED 10.9 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, COMPARED TO 9.5 PERCENT IN 1972. THESE INCREASES WERE LARGELY AT THE EXPENSE OF THE DEMOCRATIC LABOR PARTY, WHICH, WITH ONLY 1.4 PERCENT OF THE VOTE (AS AGAINST 5.25 PERCENT IN 1972) HAS ALMOST DISAPPEARED AS A NATIONAL PARTY. IT IS POSSIBLE (THOUGH NOT YET CERTAIN) THAT NO DLP SENATOR WILL BE ELECTED, AFTER ALL VOTES ARE COUNTED AND PREFERENCES DISTRIBUTED.

10. IF WHITLAM ACTS AS IF HE HAS HAD A THUMPING ELECTORAL SUCCESS AND CONTINUES TO PRESS AHEAD WITH MAJOR LEGISLATIVE AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES, THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IN AUSTRALIA WILL BE HIGHLY CHARGED OVER THE NEXT YEAR OR TWO, INVITING EARLY GENERAL ELECTIONS. HE APPEARS TO HAVE A CHOICE BETWEEN TWO MAJOR ALTERNATIVES: TO PRESS ON AHEAD WITH MAJOR CHANGES OR TO ACCEPT SNEDDEN'S JUDGEMENT THAT HE MAY "PROCEED, BUT WITH EXTREME CAUTION."

11. SOME STRAWS IN THE WIND SUGGEST THAT WHITLAM MAY IN FACT MOVE AHEAD MORE CAUTIOUSLY. HE HAS POSTPONED HIS PROJECTED EUROPEAN TRIP FOR AN INDEFINITE PERIOD IN ORDER TO TEND TO DOMESTIC LEGISLATION, HE HAS BEEN LARGELY SILENT ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN GENERAL (AND HAS GIVEN NO PUBLICITY, FOR EXAMPLE, TO AUSTRALIA'S VOTE IN FAVOR OF GUINEA-BISSAU AT WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY IN EARLY MAY), AND HE WILL BE UNDER SOME PRESSURE FROM MORE CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS IN THE ALP (PARTICULARLY THE PARTY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ORGANIZATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES) TO GO SLOW. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE TONE OF HIS SPEECH OF MAY 29 (ABOVE) SUGGESTS HE INTENDS TO GO AHEAD AT FULL SPEED, ENACTING THE WHOLE AMBITIOUS LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM HE HAS SET BEFORE THE PEOPLE.

12. THE FOCUS OF THIS PROGRAM, OF COURSE, IS CLEARLY ON DOMESTIC AFFAIRS. MOST OF OUR CONCERNS ON FOREIGN RELATIONS (WITH ONE MAJOR EXCEPTION - SEE NEXT PARA) HAVE TENDED TO DECLINE OR DISAPPEAR OVER THE PAST YEAR (VIET-NAM AND OTHER INDO-CHINA ISSUES, MIDDLE EAST, AFRICAN ISSUES, UNFORTUNATE REMARKS BY WHITLAM AND OTHER LABOR MINISTERS ON THE PRESIDENT AND WATERGATE). WHITLAM HAS MODERATED HIS REMARKS ON DIEGO GARCIA AND THE IOPZ, AND THE DEPT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS TELLS US THAT THEY HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO TAKE NO FURTHER INITIATIVE ON RECOGNITION OF NORTH KOREA. (THIS MAY NOT BE VERY SIGNIFICANT, HOWEVER, AS THE NORTH KOREANS PRESUMABLY WILL APPROACH THE AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY IN JAKARTA ON RECOGNITION IN THE NEAR FUTURE, AND WE REGARD AUSTRALIAN RECOGNITION OF THE DPRK AS INEVITABLE.) WE SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATED CHANGES IN THE ARRANGEMENTS AFFECTING NORTHWEST CAPE, AND THESE WILL PRESUMABLY BE TABLED IN PARLIAMENT IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

13. WHITLAM'S REMARKS IN PARLIAMENT APRIL 3 ABOUT NO EXTENSION OR PROLONGATION OF THE ARRANGEMENTS AFFECTING THE JOINT AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN DEFENSE INSTALLATIONS ARE A CONTINUING KEY CONCERN. WHITLAM FULLY APPRECIATES THE NATURE OF OUR CONCERN AND, WHATEVER HIS ULTIMATE GOALS MAY BE, HE MAY NOT HAVE FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE TERMINATION ARRANGEMENTS IN THE AGREEMENTS AT THE TIME HE SPOKE.

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3292

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

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14. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR OPPOSITION - SNEDDEN PREFORMED WITH SURPRISING EFFECTIVENESS DURING CAMPAIGN AND HAS EMERGED WITH CLEARLY ENHANCED STATUS. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT HE FACES ANY SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE AS OPPOSITION LEADER. HOWEVER, LIBERAL PARTY BRANCH IN VICTORIA, DOMINATED BY SMALL "1" LIBERALS, MAY BE IN FOR DIRECT CHALLENGE, AS NUMBER OF LEADING LIBERALS HAVE BEGUN TO BLAME IT FOR ITS PERFORMANCE AND, IN PARTICULAR, FOR LOSS OF SEATS OF HENTY AND ISAACS (IN MELBOURNE METROPOLITAN AREA) TO ALP AND NEAR-LOSS OF BENDIGO. SNEDDEN HAS SO FAR NOT SPOKEN TO THIS ISSUE, BUT HE HAS NOTED (CORRECTLY) THAT A CHANGE OF LESS THAN 1000 VOTES SPREAD OVER THE RIGHT DISTRICTS WOULD HAVE BROUGHT LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTIES INTO GOVERNMENT.

15. COUNTRY PARTY IMPROVED ITS OVERALL VOTING PERFORMANCE AND HAS PARTICULAR SATISFACTION OF HAVING DEFEATED LABOR MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION GRASSBY AND SO REGAINING TRADITIONAL CP SEAT. HOWEVER, LABOR RETAINED RURAL NSW SEAT OF EDEN-MONARO (ADJACENT TO CANBERRA) BY 146 VOTES OUT OF 57,000. CP WILL HAVE 21 SEATS IN NEW HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES (COMPARED WITH 20 IN OLD).

16. ONCOMING PROBLEMS - COMMENTATORS IN PRESS AND NUMEROUS LIBERAL AND COUNTRY CANDIDATES DURING CAMPAIGN PREDICTED RAPIDLY
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GROWING INFLATION AND POSSIBILITY OF ECONOMIC DOWNTURN AND GROWING UNEMPLOYMENT BY END OF 1974. IN OUR VIEW, HOWEVER, LABOR GOVERNMENT, WITH IMPORTANT EXCEPTION OF PRICE/WAGE POLICY, IS TAKING RESPONSIBLE COURSE IN SEEKING TO COOL OVERHEATED ECONOMY, AND THERE IS NO VISIBLE EVIDENCE AT THIS POINT OF AN IMMINENT ECONOMIC DOWNTURN.

17. IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY - IMPLICATIONS OF ELECTION FOR U.S. POLICY AND FOR AUSTRALIAN ECONOMIC POLICY WILL BE SUBJECTS OF SEPARATE MESSAGES.
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